

V I S C E R A L

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“Now faith is being sure of what you hope for, and certain of what you do not see.”
HEBREWS 11:1

I am here for a purpose: my faith in the Christian Gospel, which is the reason I am here making art in the first place. I want my work to be rooted in the narrative of the Christian Gospel, so that in some way it would create in people a visceral hope to find joy and inner peace, as I have found through my faith. I did not know what to do or how to start; I was so used to being told what is needed that I had forgotten what it felt like to be the creator, to have all the power over the idea, formation, and responsibility. It was through this beginning in that I decided to create *Visceral*, a montage exploring the narrative of the Christian Gospel through the abstract and everyday life.

My train of thought for *Visceral* began when I noticed patterns in the way narrative was portrayed in literature. Joseph Campbell's work was heavily influenced by psychologist Carl Jung and argued that certain myths and symbols represent archetypal patterns that have been central to human existence (30, Fogarty). The narrative of the Christian Gospel has influenced many films including those adopted from C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. These films portray themes of a sacrificial journey and redemption, and they hope to relay the narrative of the Christian Gospel. This can also be said about other popular films and classic stories in which there is a problem, and a hero who conquers the problem by restoring peace and hope back into the world. The majority of these stories have been produced using mystical creatures, deep symbolism, and an elaborative plot. As I began to see this pattern, I wondered what it would look like to portray the same underlying themes with less fantasy and more everyday life, which is the way I have personally experienced the Christian Gospel. What if moments like washing a table could represent Jesus' ability to wash away our sins (Fig.1)? Or the starting of a stove could represent

new life? What if a dying rose could represent our life cycle? Even as it decomposes, there is a beauty to its creased folds (Fig.2). What if a simple gestural animation of a body being lifted could represent how we have a Savior who will never leave us, who is the hero to save us from ultimate defeat? I created a collection of abstract ideas and forms of daily life that I felt could obtain a visceral hope through themes of the Christian Gospel. I began searching and documenting aspects of everyday life that many could relate to, such as a bonfire, a brush stroke, or a train passing through the station, so that the Christian Gospel could possibly be more concrete.

The process continued with my decision to work with film to create *Visceral*. This was just as challenging as it was investigational. It was a challenge to research and understand film, because every formal aspect was new to me, and I wrestled with how I could firmly and confidently express my faith through it. What I enjoy about film is the ability to manipulate time and space. Film is an extension in portraying one's thoughts, as one can extract multiple points of view beyond the eye of the beholder. The work itself is a 4:41 minute film exploring montage, visually relayed through a three-panel structure. This three-panel structure was inspired by the idea of unity within the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and the idea that a compilation of abstract ideas could come together to form one underlying narrative. This structure adds dimension to the way in which montage can be seen through more than one window further exemplifying juxtaposition throughout each sequence.

I filmed *Visceral* with a Canon Rebel T3 DSLR camera using several lenses and a tripod. My approach to the filming process was at first through experimentation. I achieve my best work when I film in the moment, casually recording as the day goes by

and capturing an intricate detail even if it is only four seconds of ten-minute footage. During filming, I travelled as far as possible to achieve diversity through journey and exploration. I spent time sitting by my tripod watching my sister fall asleep in the evening and wake up in the morning. I took several trips on the Blue Line in the South Loop of Chicago, Illinois, waiting for the right capture. I also was able to gather mundane moments from the past as well as moments with deep personal significance. Mundane moments like the beginning of playing a piano (Fig.3) or an egg cracking open (Fig.4). I filmed personal moments such as documentation of my grandfather in his final stages before his death in early January. Each sequence was a piece of a puzzle I was still grappling to put together to form how I felt the narrative of the Christian Gospel was truly a part of everyday life.

Throughout the postproduction process I edit and re-edit using Final Cut Pro X until I am satisfied with the overall result. I also use the ability to enhance color, as well as the ability to import and export textures and overlay them within the three-panel structure. Towards the end of the production I realized how voice narration and music can contribute to the sequential pattern of editing film. My initial approach was filming, and then experimenting with music and voice, which actually ended up making the process more complicated than vice versa. In the end it was easier to edit film to music than the other way around. However, this was just another step in achieving my goal and telling the story.

Following additional research, I became more purposeful in my approach and more attentive to how different camera angles and rigging can create a deeper connection in each transition. I created chapters: "Creation," "Fallen," "Redemption," "Journey," and

“Hope.” I considered what could be an underlying connection among the chapters that allowed them to stand alone yet also come together as a whole narrative. For the “Fallen” chapter, I considered making disruptive and sporadic cuts throughout each scene to instill tension, interrupted thought, and the idea of brokenness. A scene in this chapter depicts a hand filmed in the winter flashing before your eyes and clenching into a fist (Fig.5). I chose to edit the visual to be colder, with splashes of reds to convey violence or danger. I expanded the duration of the “Journey” chapter, allowing the audience to be immersed in the process of struggle and overcoming it.

I also researched artists who first developed the theory of montage, as well as those who have approached montage in very different methods over the years. D.W Griffith’s work experimented with how the film is born in the edit. I learned how I could heavily influence the narrative and create a stronger connection to dissimilar footage through different camera angles, compositions, and panning from one composition to the other. In the chapter “Redemption,” a scene of hands ripping paper (Fig.6) could be more powerful if portrayed through multiple points of view. The audience creates a stronger connection to moments from angles that imitate the eye, such as a camera panning up the view of a large tree (Fig.7) toward the sky and the tree’s overarching branches. The Kuleshov effect, a juxtaposition of two scenes and how they enhance each other, was another inspiration for the process of choosing what scenes to put together in *Visceral*. If I were to place the scenes of a rusting chain next to a melting piece of ice I could further convey the notion of weakness and deterioration. A combination of animated figures falling to the ground juxtaposed with shots of a dying rose could suggest of death and decay.

I wanted *Visceral* to create freedom of interpretation so that those who knew the Christian Gospel, and those who did not, could still comprehend it in some sense. Stan Brakhage's *Dog Starr Man* proved how abstract imagery juxtaposed with mundane moments could evoke a plethora of ideas through interpretation and a diverse audience. There are scenes of solar flares merged with a journey of a man with his dog, which prompts the audience to create their own interpretation of and purpose for this connection. In the chapter of *Visceral* titled "Redemption," an apple is cut followed by the reversal of a falling scarf (Fig.8&9) to represent how Jesus Christ's sacrifice removed the effects of sin. Although not explicit, it allows the audience to be left with some form of rescue.

Experimenting with duration and sound was also another vital discovery in the process of making *Visceral*. A short film produced by Ethnography Lab called *Leviathan*, showed me the power of duration and how long lengths are necessary to allow the audience to breathe and emphasize some scenes over others. In the chapter of *Visceral* titled "Journey," I slow down the duration of the gestural animations (Fig.10) to allow the audience more room to experience each scene. I was also influenced by the beauty of layering voice with abstract imagery to evoke a powerful groundbreaking statement as exemplified in Mona Hatoum's *Measure of Distance*, which exposes forms of nudity and an intimate relationship between mother and daughter. While experimenting with voice narration, I also realized the importance of text to introduce each chapter of *Visceral*.

When the screening of *Visceral* happened at the Michigan Theatre, I was struck by how the power of hard work, dedication, and research could lend itself to an audience as more than just a few minutes of entertainment. Afterwards, I was able to have deep

discussions on certain choices and decisions both aesthetically and conceptually on *Visceral*. These discussions made me wonder if this was only the beginning of *Visceral* and that there was more to explore in achieving a more detailed narrative. My desire is to own my beliefs, fully embody its power in my art, and let that guide its concept, context, and form. I hope to continue exploring this medium and to reconsider how I approach the narrative. I have been able to develop confidence in making decisions and being able to build off of my own ideas, goals, and responsibilities. It is my desire that my future would be inspired by this process to not only present awareness of the Christian Gospel, but also leave those who see it with a visceral hope.



Figure 1. Still from (Visceral) 00:02:21. 4:41 min. 2015

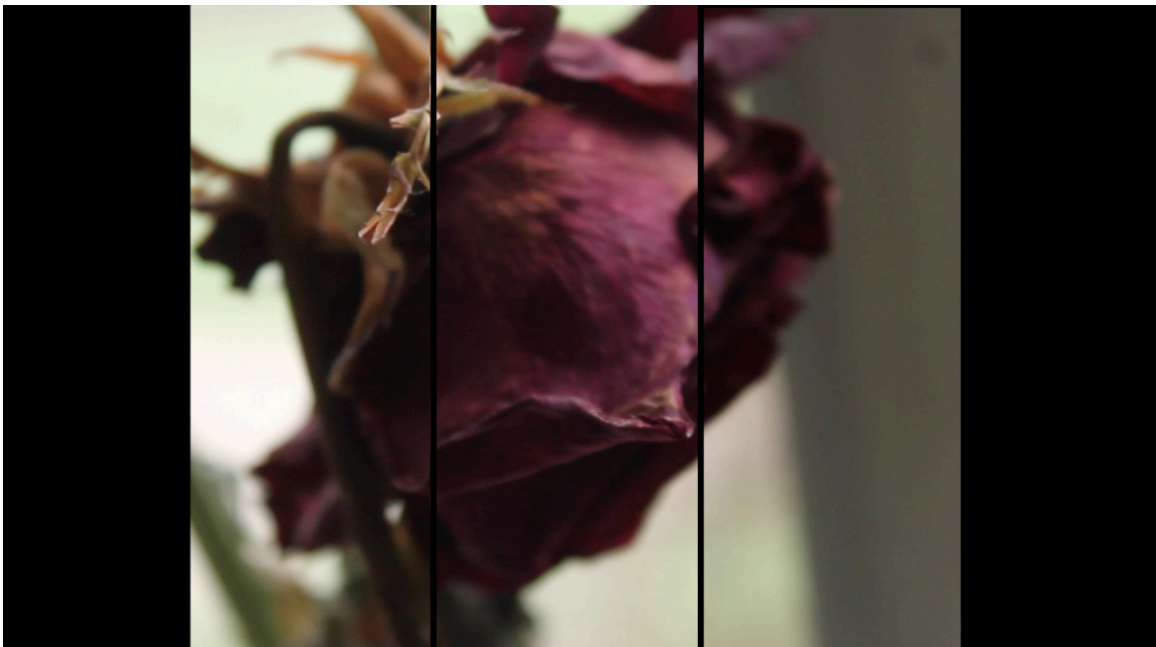


Figure 2. Still from (Visceral) 00:02:34. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 3. Still from (Visceral) 00:00:38. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 4. Still from (Visceral) 00:00:32. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 5. Still from (Visceral) 00:01:51. 4:41 min. 2015

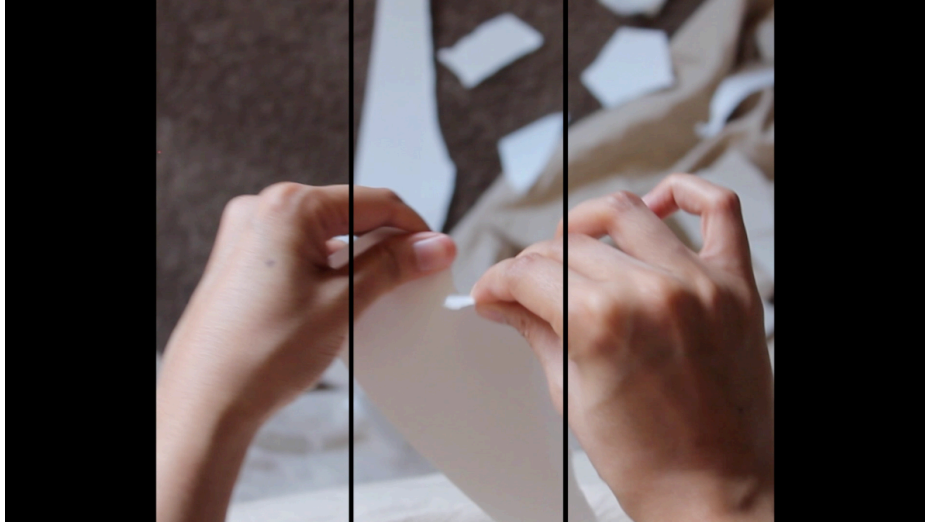


Figure 6. Still from (Visceral) 00:02:08. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 7. Still from (Visceral) 00:01:03. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 8. Still from (Visceral) 00:02:01. 4:41 min. 2015



Figure 9. Still from (Visceral) 00:02:04. 4:41 min. 2015

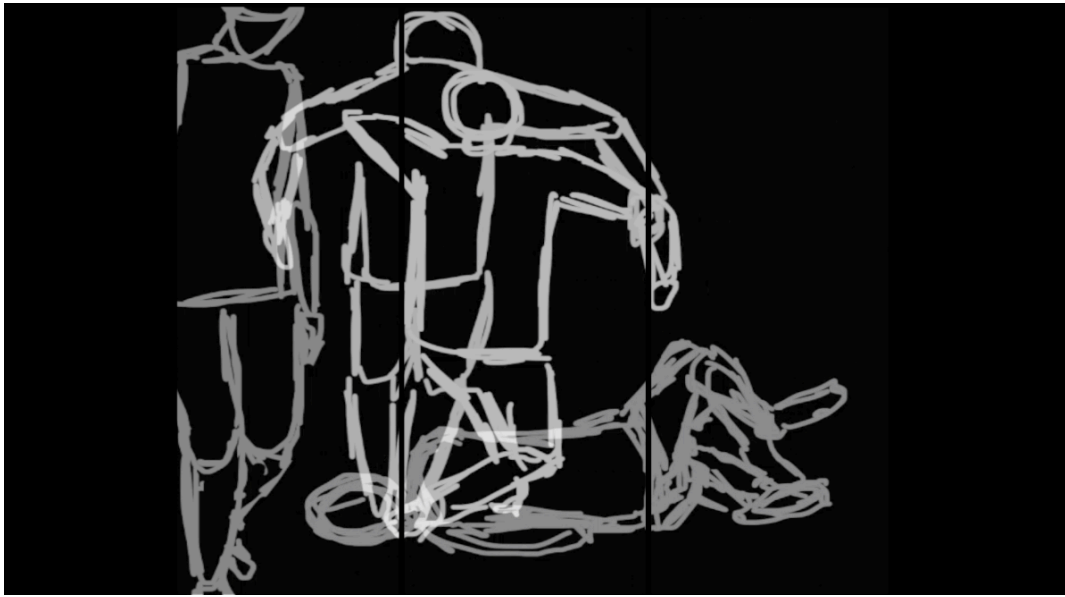


Figure 10. Still from (Visceral) 00:03:16. 4:41 min. 2015

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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